

**SHOULD THE UNITED STATES WITHDRAW
ITS FORCES FROM SOUTH KOREA?**

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In the early months of 1988, stories began appearing in the media that suggested or argued that the United States could achieve significant budgetary savings if it withdrew its forces from Korea. For example, on 18 February 1988 the Washington Post reported the beginning of a national debate that would decide how the United States will restructure its military forces in order to achieve projected budget reductions.^{1/} One of the proposals under consideration, according to the Post article, was "conducting a phased withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Korea under the argument that South Korea now has the capability to provide for almost all of its defense."^{2/} Four days after the Post article appeared, Newsweek magazine similarly reported that one area in which military costs might be reduced would be "to thin out the U.S. presence in South Korea, which now is close to matching North Korea's military strength."^{3/} The following month, Doug Bandow, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute who was a Special Assistant for Policy Development to President Reagan from 1981 to 1982, argued in an op-ed story in The New York Times that "[w]ith the apparent emergence of a stable democracy in South Korea, it is imperative that we begin pulling American forces out of the peninsula, and eventually removing Seoul from the American defense safety net."^{4/}

In June 1988 South Korea began initiating a dialogue with North Korea for a resumption of direct talks on reunification of their countries.^{5/} At the same time, a wave of anti-Americanism

began to build in South Korea.^{6/} Both situations became more pronounced in the period after the Olympics in which South Korean President Roh Tae Woo publicly made new overtures toward the North^{7/} while many of his countrymen voiced increasingly strong objections about the U.S. military presence in the South.^{8/} Indeed, there seems to be a growing consensus that a reduction of U.S. forces in South Korea could, at the same time, ease tensions between the North and the South and lessen the anti-Americanism in the South. Another benefit of such a reduction, of course, would be a financial one for the U.S. because it has been estimated that it costs U.S. taxpayers \$1 billion annually to maintain the U.S. military presence in South Korea.^{9/}

This paper examines the merits of the proposal to withdraw all or part of the United States forces from South Korea and the possible consequences that could follow from its adoption. The paper begins by providing a background discussion of how United States forces came to be stationed in South Korea and the efforts made to withdraw those forces during the past forty years. The background discussion is very important because, in large part, the debate that has recently begun is remarkably similar to other debates on this issue that have occurred periodically during the past forty years. The paper then compares the status of forces between North and South Korea in order to determine what the relative balance of power would be on the Korean peninsula if the United States forces were withdrawn. It should be emphasized

that the paper does not attempt an analysis of the broader topic of superpower military forces in the area because the author believes that if North Korea were to invade South Korea it would be done without the approval of either the Soviet Union or the People's Republic of China. Neither superpower, in the author's opinion, presently desires to become involved in a military conflict that might expose its own troops to combat with United States forces.

The paper also assumes that if U.S. forces were withdrawn from South Korea, other U.S. forces, in Japan or elsewhere, would not effectively deter North Korea from invading South Korea. That assumption is based on the author's belief that the only way U.S. forces would be committed to a large-scale and extremely violent conflict would be if U.S. forces were directly attacked in an invasion. U.S. forces not stationed in South Korea might eventually be used to defend that country, but their value as a deterrent is much less than if they came under direct attack in an invasion. Merely supporting an ally in today's political climate, without a claim that U.S. forces were attacked, may not be a sufficient justification to mobilize U.S. public opinion behind a large-scale military effort. And the Vietnam War showed that a large-scale U.S. military effort cannot easily be made or continued without the public's support.

I. Background

United States troops were first used in substantial numbers on

the Korean peninsula at the end of the Second World War. On 10-11 August 1945, less than 48 hours after the atomic bomb had exploded on Nagasaki, and with the end of the war thus viewed as imminent, key decisions were being made by United States officials that would have far greater ramifications than they possibly could have known at the time. The State Department wanted to ensure that as much of Korea would become democratic while the War Department feared that seeking too much territory could lead to a military confrontation with the Soviet Union. Because the Soviets had troops in the area and the United States had none, it was believed that a confrontation with the Soviets would result with them overrunning the entire peninsula before any American troops could even land there.

The decision was made, without much internal U.S. discussion, and without any international deliberation, that because the 38th parallel divided Korea into almost two equal parts, the Soviets would occupy all territory north of that line while the Americans would occupy all land south of that point. On 8 September 1945 the United States 7th Infantry Division landed at Inchon and arrived the next day in Seoul, where the Japanese officially surrendered their authority in Korea for the portion of Korea south of the 38th parallel. Soviet troops acted similarly with regard to the land north of the 38th parallel. Thus began the official separation of the Korean peninsula into two roughly equal geographical portions, with the largest city Seoul, and most of the population, living in the South.

Shortly thereafter, the United States undertook a massive demobilization of its military forces. United States overseas commitments of its troops were scrutinized in order to determine the best allocation of its diminishing resources for political, military, and economic reasons. After having made this review, the Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded that the United States "has little strategic interest in maintaining the present troops and bases in Korea."^{10/} Because of the global shortage of American manpower, the 45,000 American troops in Korea "could well be used elsewhere," according to the JCS.^{11/} Withdrawal of these troops "would not impair the military position of the Far East Command," unless the Soviets subsequently established a base in North Korea from which they would mount an assault on Japan.^{12/} Secretary of State George C. Marshall approved these JCS conclusions in September 1947.

The issue went from Secretary Marshall to the National Security Council in April 1948. The NSC considered three options: abandon South Korea, continue to support South Korea politically and militarily, or give aid to South Korea so it could train and equip its own security forces. The NSC recommended the third option which the President accepted. The withdrawal began on 15 September 1948 but the aid ordered by the President did not arrive as scheduled. In the meantime, on 15 August 1948, the formal inauguration of the Republic of Korea took place. But on 2 October 1948, shortly after the withdrawal of American forces

began, the new South Korean Government was beset by sabotage, demonstrations, and armed insurrections in various areas.

In view of these difficulties, and because it was obvious that the South Korean Government could not defend the country from an attack from the North, the State Department reversed its position and concluded that the continued presence of U.S. forces would have a stabilizing effect on the region. But the United Nations soon passed a resolution calling for the complete withdrawal of American forces and that caused the withdrawal to continue. By 29 June 1949 the withdrawal of U.S. combat troops was complete, with only a U.S. Military Advisory Group remaining.

While the withdrawal was being completed, however, the newly established United States Central Intelligence Agency reportedly concluded that the withdrawal would be followed by an invasion from the North, which would be coordinated with a communist-led insurrection in the South.^{13/} These conclusions, if made, were either ignored or unaccepted by U.S. policymakers. The U.S. actions, however, were closely observed by policymakers in North Korea, the People's Republic of China, and the Soviet Union.

On 17 March 1949, North Korean dictator Kim Il-sung met in Moscow with Soviet Foreign Minister Vyshinsky to conclude a ten-year economic and cultural treaty between North Korea and the Soviet Union. The treaty was intended to guarantee long-term Soviet economic activities in North Korea. It is believed by some that Kim Il-sung also asked Stalin for support of his plan to

invade South Korea and that Stalin told him to develop a more detailed plan for an attack.^{14/} On the same day, 17 March 1949, a secret mutual defense treaty was concluded between Communist China and North Korea. Under the terms of that treaty,

Communist China would be obliged to defend North Korea from any form of aggression. An attack on either of the the two parties signatory to the treaty would be repulsed by joint action, and Communist China would supply North Korea with weapons, material, and military personnel from Manchuria and northern China during the period from 1 July 1949 to 30 August 1950.^{15/}

The timing of the two events, and the fact that the PRC and the Soviet Union soon became close allies, and other evidence that exists, suggest to some that the eventual North Korean attack was done with the concurrence of both the PRC and the Soviet Union.^{16/}

While North Korea was making successful diplomatic maneuvers in preparation for a war, South Korea was being endangered by U.S. diplomatic pronouncements. On 5 January 1950, President Truman announced that the United States would not intervene militarily on behalf of the Nationalist forces even if it was attacked by the PRC. Despite significant Congressional opposition to this policy, Secretary of State Dean Acheson declared one week later that the United States would fight to defend Japan, Okinawa, and the Phillipines, but that the other Asian nations, including by implication South Korea, would have to defend themselves. There is no doubt that the Truman and Acheson declarations emboldened

North Korea and its Communist allies in deciding whether to invade South Korea.

From that time on, North Korea increased the number of border clashes with South Korean forces along the 38th parallel. It has been estimated that from 1948 until June 1950 there were 874 clashes between the two forces along the border.^{17/} North Korea also supported efforts to undermine the elections of the South Korean Government. In addition, the military superiority of North Korean forces over the South Korean forces (see Table 1 on page 40) probably contributed to a North Korean perception that it would be victorious in a war with the South.

The United States did not believe that either the Soviet Union or the People's Republic of China would support a North Korean invasion because both of those countries were still recovering from the massive losses they sustained during the Second World War. The Chinese Communists also sustained severe losses in their battle with the Nationalists. With neither great power willing to support a Northern invasion, the United States probably believed that an attack from the North would not occur.

That analysis, of course, was incorrect.

On 24 June 1950, North Korea launched a surprise attack on South Korea. The invasion, while it made significant and substantial advances, did not succeed in a quick victory. Instead, the United States had time to respond and it immediately called for an emergency meeting of the United Nations Security

Council. After the Soviet Union made a strategically untimely walkout from the Security Council, that international organization declared the armed attack on South Korea, by seven divisions and 150 tanks from North Korea, as a "breach of the peace" in violation of the U.N. Charter and the sovereignty and territorial integrity of South Korea. The Security Council ordered that a multinational force be established to come to the aid of South Korea.

On 30 June 1950 United States forces were dispatched to assist in the defense of South Korea and air attacks were begun on North Korea. The United States forces were joined by military forces from fifteen other nations and, together with the Republic of Korea forces, were brought under a single command led by General Douglas MacArthur. These Southern forces began to effectively repel the Northern invaders and after a dramatic landing at Inchon, threatened to actually defeat North Korea.

The People's Republic of China believed, however, that a united Korea controlled by Seoul would be inimical to its interests. Consequently, it responded to the Inchon landing by sending numerous troops to assist the North Koreans. These forces were supported by large infusions of war materiel from the Soviet Union and despite staggering losses, the Chinese and North Koreans succeeded in pushing the United Nations forces back to the 38th parallel. The armistice signed in 1953 brought the conflict to a close by establishing a narrow four kilometer demilitarized

zone ("DMZ") and by placing the responsibility of maintaining the peace in the hands of the opposing military commanders.

During the three-year conflict, the United States lost 54,000 soldiers and had over 100,000 nonfatal casualties. Estimates of the total monetary cost of the war have ranged from \$20 to \$80 billion. Seoul, the capital of South Korea, was captured and recaptured four times during the fighting and was devastated by the conflict. Other regions of the peninsula were also left in ruins. Almost 4 million Koreans died. Approximately 120,000 of these people were South Koreans who were executed by the Northern invaders during their occupation of the South, leaving survivors in the South bitter and suspicious of the North even today, thirty-five years later.

The Korean War demonstrated, if nothing else, that the superpowers believed that the Korean peninsula had very significant geographic and strategic importance. The United States and the People's Republic of China sustained large losses in personnel, and the Soviet Union expended large amounts of materiel, in order to preserve their strategic interests.

Indeed, the United States, if somewhat belatedly, formally realized the strategic importance of Korea when it signed a Mutual Defense Treaty with South Korea on 8 August 1953. Under Article 2 of the Treaty, the United States is required to "maintain and develop appropriate means to deter armed attack" on South Korea. But despite this commitment, on 26 December 1953, President

Eisenhower announced the gradual withdrawal of U.S. forces from Korea and stated that it would begin with the immediate withdrawal of two divisions. This was followed by an announcement by Secretary of State Dulles that the U.S. might bomb the People's Republic of China if it supported a new invasion of South Korea.

The South Korean Government was not satisfied by the Dulles declaration and it strongly protested the withdrawal decision to the United States Government. The South Koreans believed that the withdrawal of U.S. forces at the end of World War II led to a breakdown in deterrence and encouraged the North Koreans to invade. The United States sought to alleviate these South Korean concerns by leaving behind its military equipment that was previously used by the now withdrawing forces. The United States made its decision on the fact that hostilities had ceased and that Chinese forces were also withdrawing. The U.S. withdrawal continued in the Nixon administration so that by 1971 only one division of 43,000 men remained. In addition, the United States forces were no longer positioned along the DMZ, although the U.S. 2nd Infantry Division was waiting in reserve to help defend the twenty-six mile corridor that connected the DMZ to Seoul. The infantry were supported by a wing of U.S. fighter-bombers and by tactical nuclear weapons. The small size of the American force, as compared to the much larger forces of North and South Korea, made it apparent that it served primarily as a deterrent against a new North Korean invasion and not as a military force to repulse such an attack.

The value of that United States deterrent began to be questioned in the 1970's as the American relations with the PRC improved. The argument was that because of the improvement of U.S. relations with the People's Republic of China, the Chinese would be less willing to come to the assistance of the North Koreans as they did in 1950 if the North Koreans chose on their own to invade South Korea. If the Chinese would no longer support the North Koreans in an invasion, some people argued, then it was no longer necessary to maintain U.S. forces in South Korea because the South Koreans could now successfully defend themselves.

Others challenged that argument. Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger testified before a congressional committee in February 1974 that U.S. forces were in South Korea not primarily to oppose Chinese support for the North Koreans but rather "to serve as a symbol of America's continued interest in the overall stability of that part of the world during a period of some tension."^{18/} He added that while these forces acted as a "hedge against military uncertainties" their primary purpose was political.¹⁹ He reaffirmed this view one year later in 1975 before another congressional subcommittee by testifying that "our forces there serve to contribute to stability on the Korean peninsula and in the area and a precipitous withdrawal would be destabilizing."^{20/}

Despite these warnings, then-Presidential candidate Jimmy Carter told a group of editorial writers for the Washington Post

in early 1975 that he would remove U.S. troops from South Korea as a way not only to save money but also to improve defense management. At that time, Carter apparently wanted to withdraw all U.S. troops from South Korea. Later, in 1975, he modified that approach to consist only of a withdrawal of U.S. ground troops (and not air force personnel) only because of a fear that an independent South Korean air force might make a preemptive strike against North Korea. In 1976, during the Presidential campaign, Carter was publicly committed to a withdrawal of U.S. troops over five years but even that decision became less firm as the campaign progressed. After Carter was elected, the Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, announced that the new administration was committed to a withdrawal of U.S. troops, but he did not state how long the withdrawal would take.

Carter ordered that studies of the withdrawal be conducted under the premise that the withdrawal would occur and that the only remaining issue would be the manner in which it would be conducted. Carter's decision was said to be based on the principle that U.S. troops should not be stationed abroad unless there was a strong justification for it. "Carter is said to have added that he had not yet seen a convincing argument for keeping U.S. troops in Korea indefinitely."^{21/} One scholar, while noting the lack of an elaborate statement by the Administration in justifying its position, offered the following reasons to support the withdrawal:

1. The growing military capability of the South Korean armed forces to deter an attack from the North with U.S. ground forces.
2. The important advantages enjoyed by the South in geography (specifically, terrain), economic vitality, and population.
3. The psychological, political, and diplomatic costs for South Korea of perpetuating an unnecessary dependence.
4. The lack of any justification for automatic U.S. involvement in a potential conflict when the South Koreans are capable of handling the situation without any U.S. ground forces.
5. The likelihood that the withdrawal of U.S. forces will gradually help create a basis for a modus vivendi between the two Koreas and thus provide a more meaningful stability than one based on the perpetual presence of U.S. forces.^{22/}

The most important of these factors was the first one: the relative military strength of North and South Korea. The general consensus in 1976 was that there was a balance of power between the two Koreas such that "neither has the overwhelming military superiority that would give it high confidence in its ability to conquer the other in an all-out struggle in which no outside forces were involved."^{23/} That conclusion was based on generally-accepted data from the International Institute for Strategic Studies (see Table 2 on page 41) that showed that South Korea had 625,000 members of its active armed forces while North Korea had only 467,000; South Korea had 1,000,000 reserves while

North Korea had only 250,000; and both sides had about 1,000 medium tanks. There was a large disparity in the number of combat aircraft with North Korea having 588 while South Korea had only 216; but that disparity was minimized by a perception that the planes the South had, albeit fewer in number, were superior in quality.

In sum, it was reasonable to believe, based upon this data, that there existed an overall military balance between North and South Korea. President Carter relied upon such a conclusion when he formally announced on 5 May 1977 that he was making a Presidential decision to withdraw all U.S. ground forces from South Korea over a 4 to 5 year period.

The data and the conclusions based thereon were not accepted by everyone concerned with the issue. General Richard G. Stilwell (ret.), who was the Commander-in-Chief, United Nations Command, from August 1973 through October 1976, stated in 1977, shortly after he retired, that the U.S. should not withdraw its forces because "[t]hese are the hard facts:^{24/}

- . North Korea outmans South Korea; while South Korea may have a larger numerical force than North Korea, South Korea fields fewer divisions than does North Korea and the combat power of a North Korean division is at least equal to that of a South Korean division.
- . North Korea outguns South Korea by 2 to 1 in artillery, 2 1/1 to 1 in armor, 2 to 1 in combat aircraft and 2 to 1 in naval combatants.

- . North Korea intends to increase its military superiority.
- . North Korean forces are positioned along the DMZ so they can attack with little or no prior movement and with only a few hours' warning.
- . North Korean forces are very well-defended.

General Stilwell's criticisms were echoed almost simultaneously by the U.S. Chief of Staff in Korea, Major General John K. Singlaub, who was quoted in an interview by the Washington Post as stating that the withdrawal of U.S. ground forces would increase the risk of war on the Korean peninsula. General Singlaub was relieved of his command because of these statements. He subsequently testified before the Investigations Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee that current intelligence on the North Korean military had revealed significant increases since Governor Carter had first proposed the withdrawal in 1975. General Singlaub claimed that the North Koreans had undertaken an extensive military buildup that included a quadrupling of its number of tanks, and had achieved large increases in other weapons, such as artillery pieces, jet fighters, armored personnel carriers, and combatant ships. General Singlaub questioned whether the President's decision was made based on outdated and inaccurate data.

This disagreement over the content and interpretation of the relevant data continued with congressional involvement in the issue from 1977 to 1979. The Senate Armed Services Committee, in

its report accompanying the fiscal year 1979 Defense Authorization Act, stated:

The committee is concerned about the possible risks to the current military balance of any further withdrawals. The Secretary of Defense is therefore directed to provide an analysis to the committee before any future withdrawal of ground combat troops. That analysis should consider at least the following points: the effect of any proposed withdrawal plan on preserving deterrence in Korea; the reaction anticipated from North Korea; a consideration of the effect of the plan on increasing incentives for South Korea to develop an independent nuclear deterrent; the effect of any withdrawal on our long-term military and economic partnership with Japan; the effect of any proposed withdrawal on the United States/Chinese and United States/Soviet military balance; and, the possible implications of any proposed withdrawal on the Soviet/Chinese military situation.^{25/}

While that new review of the intelligence data was ongoing, President Carter went forward with implementing his withdrawal decision, although in a more cautious manner. On 21 April 1978, President Carter announced that the number of troops that would be withdrawn in 1978 was being reduced from 6,000 to 3,436. The balance of 2,564 personnel would not be withdrawn until 1979. The emphasis on which types of personnel that would be withdrawn early also was shifted by the President from combat troops to support personnel. And in recognition of the ongoing intelligence review, President Carter stated in a letter to Speaker O'Neill dated 20 July 1978 that:

I expect the withdrawal program to be carried out in a manner which preserves a military balance, and thus protects the security of the Republic of Korea. Should circumstances affecting the balance change significantly, we will assess these changes in close consultation with the Congress, the Republic of Korea and our other Asian allies. Our plan will be adjusted if developments so warrant.^{26/}

The new intelligence review was completed in 1979 with startling results. According to Congressman Les Aspin, a leading member of the House Armed Services Committee, the revised intelligence estimates stated that North Korea had between 550,000 and 600,000 ground forces instead of the previous estimate of 450,000; the number of North Korean divisions was revised from 29 to 37; the number of tanks were increased by 35 percent, and the number of artillery tubes and armored personnel carriers were greater by 20 percent. Congressman Aspin thus concluded that the ratio of North to South Korean forces had "changed dramatically."^{27/}

Congressman Aspin explained that the reason for the previous underestimation of North Korea's forces is that it was previously believed that North Korea, like South Korea, had its forces positioned along the DMZ and not held in reserve. That belief proved to be incorrect. North Korea had significant forces in the interior of the country and the U.S. intelligence community had little information about those forces and did not include them in its previous estimates of the size of the North Korean forces.^{28/} And, although it was not clear whether North Korea was keeping those troops in reserve for offensive or for defensive strategic reasons,^{29/} in either event, North Korea's forces were much stronger than had previously been thought by U.S. intelligence experts and policymakers.

As a result of this new intelligence estimate, Congressional opposition to President Carter's plan to withdraw the U.S. ground forces in South Korea intensified. On 26 July 1978, as part of the International Security Assistance Act, the Senate approved the Percy Amendment which provided that the scheduled withdrawal of 26,000 troops by 1982 might "seriously risk upsetting the military balance in the region" and it required the President to consult with Congress on plans for future withdrawals. The House of Representatives followed the Senate lead and agreed to identical language in the Derwinski Amendment. In response to this Congressional pressure, in July 1979 the President suspended indefinitely his plan to withdraw any additional troops from Korea. The Reagan Administration, in contrast to the Carter Administration, restored the troop levels to 43,000 which is where they have remained until today. The role these U.S. troops play in the region can only be appreciated after comparing the military forces of North and South Korea.

II. The Military Forces of North and South Korea

According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, the North Korea armed forces consist of approximately 838,000 people. That number is unchanged since 1985-86. Figure 1 (on page 42), compiled from data issued by the Institute since 1971, shows that the major increase occurred in 1979-80 when the intelligence estimates were revised to include troops located in the interior of the country. In contrast, the size of the South

Korea armed forces has remained relatively constant at about 622,000 people. Thus, the disparity in comparative size of the two forces, which so concerned members of Congress in 1979, has widened in the interim.

The number of tanks possessed by both sides has also changed significantly over time. Figure 2 (on page 43) shows that when Governor Carter first began advocating a withdrawal of U.S. forces in 1975, North Korea had about 1,200 tanks while South Korea had about 1,000. By the time of the revised intelligence estimate in 1979, North Korea's force of tanks had grown to 2300 tanks and it has continued to grow and today it has about 3,500 while South Korea has only 1,300.

North Korea also has maintained its numerical superiority in combat aircraft. As shown in Figure 3 (on page 44), in the 1970's it maintained a force of about 600 aircraft while South Korea averaged about 250. In the 1980's both sides have increased the numbers of their combat aircraft with North Korea possessing about 840 and South Korea only 476. The disparity has remained about the same with North Korea maintaining a strong lead of 300-370 combat aircraft.

Both sides have thus substantially increased the size of their military forces. Both sides have also increased the quality of their armaments with North Korea getting more of the latest in Soviet weaponry and South Korea getting more of the latest in American weaponry. Together, the two countries have created the

greatest peacetime concentration of opposing forces in the history of the world.

III. The Intentions of North and South Korea

Since 1948 when the reunification talks failed, the issue of reunification has retained great importance in both North and South Korea. How the two nations have acted in furthering the goal of reunification has, however, differed dramatically. The North, although it suffers from a poor economy, continues to spend approximately 20 - 25 percent of its Gross National Product in order to maintain its military superiority over the South. The South spends only six percent of its GNP on its military forces. While some of the disparity may be due to the fact that the North has about only one-half the South's population and less than half the South's GNP, North Korea has been spending much more than necessary to maintain either parity with the South or to deter a Southern invasion. Moreover, the North's continued heavy expenditures on tanks which are considered to be primarily offensive weapons, despite having more than twice as many as the South, leads to a conclusion that the North is maintaining an offensive force. It may be a force that could use its large superiority in tanks, combat aircraft, and soldiers to attack across the DMZ in a blitzkrieg maneuver in order to reach Seoul, which is not only the capital of South Korea and where 25% of its population live, but which is only 26 miles from the DMZ. Two scholars have estimated that in a full-scale invasion, almost

20 percent of the South's forces would be destroyed in the first 90 seconds and that within 48 hours North Korean tanks would approach Seoul.^{30/} Although that estimate may be too extreme, it does support the argument that a Northern attack force might successfully use a blitzkrieg maneuver.

South Korea has responded to the North's offensive buildup by increasing and improving its defensive forces. Partly in response to President Carter's withdrawal plan, the South began a plan designed to develop a military self-sufficiency. South Korea now produces tanks, artillery pieces, antitank TOW missiles, and it coproduces fighter planes and helicopters with the United States. It has deployed its forces in hardened facilities along the narrow passageways leading to Seoul but, as noted above, it is unlikely that those forces could stop a full-scale North Korean invasion.

Indeed, other actions taken by North Korea could be interpreted as preparations for an invasion of the South. Numerous tunnels dug by the North Koreans under the DMZ, which could be used in an invasion, have been uncovered. These tunnels have been dug deeper and deeper and in a more sophisticated manner. Efforts to locate these tunnels have been compared to finding a needle in a haystack by one intelligence expert.^{31/} North Korea's purpose in constructing these tunnels must be either to prepare for an invasion or to make South Korea believe that North Korea is preparing for an invasion. Either possibility is destabilizing.

Even more importantly, North Korea has sought to eliminate the South Korean leadership. In 1983 South Korean President Chun Doo Hwan was the target of a North Korean assassination attack in Rangoon. He narrowly escaped with his life although 17 of his aides, including four cabinet ministers, were not as fortunate. It is unclear what North Korea hoped to accomplish by assassinating President Chun. It could have led to a war.

North Korea also has made numerous attempts to drive a wedge between the United States and South Korea in order to persuade the United States to withdraw its troops from South Korea. On 23 January 1968 North Korea seized the U.S. intelligence ship Pueblo while it was in either international or disputed waters. Eleven months later 82 crew members and one body were returned to the United States. On 15 April 1969 North Korea downed a U.S. EC-121 while it was flying over the Sea of Japan. There were no survivors among the 31 crew members. On 18 August 1976 two U.S. Army officers were brutally murdered by North Korean guards wielding axes. The Americans were only supervising the provision of security for South Koreans who were trimming a poplar tree. In none of these incidents did the United States retaliate by attacking North Korean soldiers or property.

Not only are North Korea's acts destabilizing and a reason for concern, but until very recently the tenor and substance of the information published by the state-controlled press was also disconcerting. For example, a review of North Korea news stories

in March 1988, as translated by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), contains the following:

[Text] Pyongyang March 12 (KCNA)--A few days ago, U.S. Vice-President Bush told reporters that the U.S. forces present in South Korea were a war "deterrent force," and earlier, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Derwinski described the presence of the U.S. forces in South Korea as one aimed at keeping "peace" on the Korean peninsula, saying there would be no change in the United States' Korea policy.

A signed commentary of NOGONG SINMUN today brands this as a hokum revealing again the brigandish brazenfacedness of the U.S. imperialists who are accustomed to reversing black and white.

It says:

What the U.S. imperialists have done in Korea after illegally occupying South Korea are a war of aggression, ceaseless armed provocations, separatist moves and suppression and plunger of the South Korean people.

It is the height of shamelessness for the U.S. ruling quarters to talk about a "deterrent force" and the like, daringly connecting the U.S. forces' occupation of South Korea with a mission of keeping peace.

The U.S. ruling quarters should desist from futile moves and take steps to pull their forces of aggression and all destruction weapons out of South Korea at an early date. 32/

Another story published two days later stated:

Paper Says No Following U.S. Two-Korea Policy
SK151131 Pyongyang Domestic Service in Korean
0006 GMT 14 Mar 88

[NODONG SINMUN 14 March commentary: "Does National Self-Esteem Sit Well With a Colonial Puppet?"]

[Text] Traitor No Tae-u, who has recently occupied the position of fascist power, is now babbling that his taking of power has paved a way for an era of national

lf-esteem in South Korea. This cannot be called anything short of presumptuous and ridiculous.

It is basic common knowledge that for a nation to respect itself it must be free from the domination of outside forces. South Korea is a complete colony and a nuclear forward base of the U.S. imperialists. The U.S. imperialists reign in South Korea as the de facto rulers holding all manner of power, including the prerogative of supreme command.

It is none other than the U.S. imperialists who appoint and sack presidents at their whim and it is none other than the United States that has a free hand in formulating and executing the so-called policies in South Korea. The U.S. imperialists permit nothing that runs counter to their interests.

In South Korea national dignity and sovereignty are mercilessly trampled under the aggressors' military boots, the national economy has been thrown into the mouth of a tiger called U.S. and Japanese monopoly capital, and good national morals and manners are being stifled by the Yankee culture, things Japanese, and the American way of life.

The recent games in South Korea, the so-called presidential election and change of government, have once again proved to what extent South Korea has been subjugated to the United States. The game called change of government which has landed traitor No Tae-u in the office of power is a farcical changing of the running dogs staged according to a U.S. imperialists' scenario and their behind-the-scenes control. This view is commonly shared by the South Korean people and world opinion.^{33/}

These stories are only two examples of the North Korean Government's portrayal of South Korea as a puppet of the United States and that in order for there to be real progress towards reunification talks with the South, American troops must be withdrawn. Indeed, these stories, and many more, claim that the United States has "militarily occupied" South Korea since World War II as part of its imperialist philosophy.^{34/} Other stories claim that the "U.S. imperialists and their South Korean puppets

are warmongers who are unscrupulous about any wicked method of war for realizing their northward aggression."^{35/}

This propaganda (and any objective and informed reader would have to consider these stories as propaganda) serves a number of important purposes for the North Korean Government. Primarily, it helps to maintain feelings of hostility towards South Korea and the United States so that if there is another war, the North will be sufficiently prepared psychologically. It also allows the North Korean Government to devote a large portion of its GNP to maintaining its military capability, even though its economy is struggling. In addition, if the North Korean people ever realized that the South posed no military threat, and that the standard of living in the South is vastly superior to that in the North, it would be possible that the makings of a revolution would exist. The Government's use of its propaganda is much more Orwellian than that which exists anywhere else in the world, including the Soviet Union.

In contrast, the newspapers from South Korea, which are controlled but not owned by the Government, do not serve to promote hatred of the North. Although it is true that the newspapers in the South often refer to the North Koreans as "puppets" of the Soviets, the comments from Government officials offer a message of deterrence to the North instead of preparing

the populace for war as the Northern papers seem to do. For example, this story in March 1988 appeared in the South Korea press:

O Cha-pok Warns North of "Retaliatory" Response
SK181046 Seoul TONG-A ILBO in Korean 18 Mar 88 p. 1

[Text] In referring to the midair terrorist explosion of Korean Air Flight 858 that was perpetrated by puppet North Korea, on 18 March, National Defense Minister O Cha-pok declared: "If puppet North Korea perpetrates a similar incident in the future, our side, in considering this to be a declaration of war against us, will offer a powerful retaliatory response."

After stating this at a meeting with reporters covering the National Defense Ministry that morning, Minister O said: "If puppet North Korea carries out various provocations due to its miscalculations, it will be crushed at an early stage by our operational units, which have been trained and prepared in advance."^{36/}

In fact, until recently, the state of relations with North Korea was given relatively little attention in South Korean newspapers. Instead, the focus of the newspaper stories was clearly related to commercial enterprises and in improving the country's economic stature. There seemed to be little fear, at least in the newspapers, with the story quoted above perhaps being an exception, that the North planned to invade the South in the near future. There certainly was no comparable effort to prepare the populace for the possibility of war.

This lack of attention towards North Korea changed in South Korea and everywhere else as the world prepared to participate in the Olympic games hosted by South Korea at the end of last

summer. Almost daily, newspaper stories appeared with speculations as to how the North might act to sabotage the games.³⁷ Concern was expressed that the North might use terrorism to ruin the games, or even use this opportunity to launch an invasion of the South.^{38/}

South Korean President Roh Tae Woo, who had been in office only since February 1988, responded by increasing his diplomatic overtures to the North. On 3 June 1988 President Roh made a high-profile call for the resumption of direct negotiations with the North.^{39/} On 7 July 1988 he expanded his by announcing a new policy that included the goals of human exchanges and trade between the two countries.^{40/} His initiative also urged the improvement of ties between North Korea and the United States.

North Korea rejected these proposals and instead offered to act as host for the first joint parliamentary meeting in Pyongyang to discuss a nonaggression pact.^{41/} South Korea welcomed this proposal,^{42/} leading some observers to conclude that tensions between the two countries were beginning to ease.^{43/} Indeed, the Olympic games were conducted successfully without any serious security threats, which also had the byproduct of boosting President Roh's standing in South Korea and in the world.

President Roh wasted no time in taking advantage of his new popularity. He escalated his diplomatic overtures towards the North.^{44/} This effort began with a meeting among officials from the two countries^{45/} and it culminated with a speech President

Roh gave to the United Nations General Assembly on 18 October 1988 in which he urged the establishment of "a conference for peace" that would seek the reunification of the two Koreas.^{46/}

President Roh's efforts were supported by the United States. On 20 October 1988 President Reagan told President Roh that the U.S. would soon announce conciliatory gestures toward North Korea to support Roh's initiatives.^{47/} During an informal news conference at which these plans were announced, a reporter asked President Reagan whether he could "envision a time in the near future when the U.S. would be reducing its military presence" in the area.^{48/} President Reagan responded that that is "a possibility."^{49/} He added that this would not be a question of "just withdrawing" but rather one of being "no longer needed."^{50/}

President Reagan's comments were quickly "clarified" by State and Defense Department officials who stated that before such a withdrawal would take place you would have to conclude that "the threat from North Korea was over."^{51/} And in opinion of those officials, the threat from North Korea is not over.^{52/}

These actions were followed by an announcement on 31 October 1988 that the U.S. was relaxing restrictions on trade with, travel to and diplomatic contact with North Korea.^{53/} The State Department indicated that these actions were being taken to support President Roh's efforts to improve the ties between North and South Korea.^{54/}

But how has North Korea acted toward these initiatives?
Obviously, one cannot hope to ascertain the true intentions of the North Korean leadership, but an examination of news accounts that have appeared in the North Korean press reveals the public position being taken by the government:

KCNA Decries 'Big Firepower Battle Exhibition'
SK1411110988 Pyongyang KCNA in English
1013 GMT 14 Nov 88

["Fascist Clique Incites War Fever Against North": KCNA headline]

[Text] Pyongyang November 14 (KCNA)--The No Tae-u military fascist clique on November 12 staged a "big firepower battle exhibition" of a unit of the puppet army, inciting war fever against the North, according to a report.

In this provocative military exercise the fascist clique openly "defined" the northern half of the country as "enemy" and frantically fired guns at a target simulating the area of the northern half for hours, crying that a "big firepower battle" is aimed at "containing" the "enemy" in a three-dimensional war of the ground, naval and air forces. And subsidized radios loudly propagandized this frantic military row.

The provocative "big firepower battle exhibition" reveals once again that the No Tae-u "regime" is an anti-national "regime" which is little different from the previous puppet regime in dreaming of northward invasion. And this tells that "peace" and "peaceful reunification" on the lips of the South Korean treacherous clique are a hypocritical talk and what they seek is war and division.

South Korean people will never pardon the fascist clique rushing headlong toward aggravating the military confrontation.^{55/}

And a few days later:

KCNA Denounces South-U.S. Military Ties
SK1811103088 Pyongyang KCNA in English
1020 GMT 18 Nov 88

["Outburst of Fascist Clique Curring Favour With U.S. Imperialist Master"--KCNA headline]

[Text] Pyongyang November 18 (KCNA)--The South Korean puppet defence minister on November 15 had a military confab with the newly appointed commander of the U.S. imperialist aggression forces in the Pacific who flew into Seoul, according to a report.

The puppet defence minister begged him to make efforts to attain the "common goal" of the puppet army and the U.S. forces, hammering away at the poppycock that the command of the U.S. imperialist aggression forces in the Pacific is the "kernel of world peace".

Such sophism can be uttered only by the No Tae-u military fascist clique, a dirty colonial stooge of the U.S. imperialists.

It is known to the world that the U.S. imperialist aggression forces in the Pacific are the aggression forces wrecking peace and aggravating the military tensions on the Korean peninsula and the Asian-Pacific region.

These aggression forces are getting frantic with the new war provocation manoeuvres, while moving in and around the East Sea of Korea at all times and staging all kinds of aggressive military exercises including the "Team Spirit" joint military rehearsal. It is not difficult to gather that the "common goal" on the lips of the puppets is a wild ambition for aggression on the northern half of the DPRK and other socialist countries.^{56/}

These examples of recent news stories indicate that, at least publicly, very little (if any) change has occurred in the rhetoric stated by the North Korean government. This propaganda may or may not be reflective of the true intentions of the North. It does suggest, however, that the role of the U.S. forces in South Korea be carefully evaluated before they are withdrawn.

IV. The Role of U.S. Forces in South Korea

There are approximately 43,000 United States troops in South Korea. That total is less than seven percent of the South Korean forces and, in all likelihood, would not have a significant impact on an all-out Northern invasion unless significant numbers of reinforcements were sent. It should thus be obvious that the United States troops in Korea serve primarily as a deterrent. They have done so since the large majority of U.S. forces were withdrawn after the armistice was signed in 1953. But the nature of the deterrent has changed over time. Initially, it was designed to deter the Chinese from initiating or supporting a new Northern invasion. As relations between the United States and the People's Republic of China improved in the 1970's, the likelihood that China would support North Korea in an attack on the South lessened in a related fashion. Indeed, some observers in the West now believe that the Chinese would be more likely to support the South than the North if the war should be resumed.

With the diminishing Chinese presence in North Korea, the Soviet Union increased its influence in the region. A large Soviet military buildup in Asia has been viewed by some as support for the theory that the Soviets were planning to support North Korea in a new offensive. This theory is supported by the realization that with the exception of the Korean peninsula, Asia is presently very stable, with the outbreak of large-scale

hostilities involving Soviet troops being very unlikely. There thus seems to be little logic behind the Soviet buildup unless it intends to use those forces on the Korean peninsula.

The Soviet buildup in Asia, however, was begun in the early 1970's under Leonid Brezhnev, who, later ordered the invasion of Afghanistan. Brezhnev's militaristic policies seem to have been rejected by the new Kremlin leadership, especially by Mikhail Gorbachev. The Soviets under Gorbachev have now withdrawn half of their forces from Afghanistan and they seem unwilling to commit their forces elsewhere. Like the South Koreans, the Soviets now seem to enjoy having a large military force but prefer to focus their primary efforts to improving their domestic economy. The Soviets thus are unlikely to encourage the North Koreans to invade South Korea.

But if the United States troops are not necessary to deter the Chinese or the Soviets, then what deterrent value are they serving? The answer to this rhetorical question also seems to be obvious. The United States forces are deterring North Korea from invading the South. That the U.S. troops have had that effect is apparent from the propaganda from the North. Indeed, North Korea has made extensive efforts, as discussed above, to "persuade" the United States that the troops should be withdrawn. The primary strategy has been to portray the United States as an "occupier" of South Korea in order to encourage demonstrations by the South

Korean people against their American "oppressors." That effort has been extremely unsuccessful and the large majority of South Koreans, especially their governmental officials, oppose any withdrawal of American troops.

The more important and difficult question is whether keeping United States forces in South Korea is necessary to deter the North from invading. As was discussed above in Part II, North Korea retains a significant military edge over South Korea. But a North Korea army advancing towards Seoul would be faced with mountainous terrain and heavily fortified passages. Most military experts estimate that in such terrain, blitzkrieg is very difficult because the invading force is likely to suffer three times as many casualties as the defending force if the defenders are adequately forewarned of the attack. Thus, if South Korea's military intelligence is adequate, a Northern invasion could be stopped theoretically by a force only one-third the size of the invaders. But if those military theorists are wrong, and recently some other military scholars have questioned the reliability of that 3 to 1 ratio, then South Korea would need a greater force to repel a North Korean invasion.

Both of these tactical analyses, however, miss the point. The relevant issue is not whether North or South Korea would ultimately win a war; rather, despite which military theorists are correct, the issue that will be faced by the next American President is whether North Korea would invade South Korea if the

American troops were withdrawn. No one, of course, can answer that question with complete certainty at this time. North Korea is preparing to change leadership from Kim Il-sung to his son and an invasion during that transformation of power may be unlikely. On the other hand, Kim Il-sung, who has ruled North Korea almost single-handedly for forty years, may view the upcoming transfer of power as his last opportunity to achieve the primary goal of his lifetime: to reunite the Korean peninsula on his terms.

Moreover, with the lack of real support from the Chinese and the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, Kim Il-sung must be feeling increasingly isolated in the world arena. Coupled with the fact that South Korea seems to be making rapid strides to stabilizing its newly elected democratic government and with the recognition that in the long-term North Korea cannot hope to maintain military superiority over a vastly superior South Korean economy, a potential powderkeg exists. In other words, if North Korea ever hopes to conquer South Korea or achieve reunification under terms more favorable to itself than South Korea, it has to act soon. If it waits too long the opportunity will be lost forever.

In view of this, withdrawal of U.S. troops could be disastrous. If the Korean War in 1950-53 cost U.S. taxpayers between \$20-\$80 billion and 54,000 American lives, a new outbreak in hostilities would likely be much much greater. The sizes of both North and South Korean forces have grown exponentially since

1953 and the lethality of their weapons have increased dramatically. American losses in such a full-scale conflict would be horrendous.

The United States, of course, would not have to provide large-scale support to South Korea in a new conflict like it did in 1950. Such a decision, however, would not only seem to be against the intent of the 1953 Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States and South Korea but it would also call into question commitments made by the United States all over the world, especially to Japan. Moreover, the United States has greatly increased its ties to, and interests in, South Korea since 1950. Today, South Korea is the United States' seventh largest trading partner with more than \$20 billion traded between the two countries annually. It is thus unlikely the United States would allow South Korea to be conquered by the North.

If the impetus to withdraw U.S. troops were based on budgetary considerations (as is suggested by the stories in The Washington Post and Newsweek discussed in this paper's introduction) then the solution would seem to be to have the South Koreans pay for part or all of the costs sustained by the United States in maintaining its forces in South Korea. A precedent already exists between the United States and Japan whereby Japan pays \$45,000 annually to the United States for each soldier stationed in Japan. A similar arrangement could be worked out between the United States and Korea because the Korean Government has frequently and

vociferously stated that the United States should not withdraw its forces. Such an arrangement would also have the incidental benefit of lessening the outcry from American businesses who complain that while we defend South Korea militarily, they are engaging in unfair trade practices against us.

This solution would change the focus of the discussion, and properly so, from whether the United States should withdraw its forces from South Korea to how much each country should pay for them. The alternative, withdrawal of U.S. troops, might theoretically save money in the long-term (in the short-term it would be costly to withdraw the troops) but only if a war did not result from that action. Indeed, in that sense, this whole debate was undertaken in 1948 when the United States Government decided it was too costly to maintain its forces in South Korea. The subsequent complete withdrawal is correctly viewed by many South Koreans as a major factor that caused the war. Fifty-three thousand lives and billions of dollars later the United States would be repeating the errors of forty years ago by withdrawing its troops from South Korea.

The problem with this solution is that it may be politically impossible for the South Korean Government to accept it even if it wanted to do so. The rise of anti-Americanism in South Korea,⁵⁷ which perhaps peaked near the end of the Olympic games, would make it very difficult for the South Korean Government to even propose publicly that it begin to pay for the U.S. forces. The Japanese could pay

for them but there remains a high level of hostility between Japan and South Korea.

The problem thus defies an easy solution. If the two Koreas are somehow able to succeed in their current efforts at reunification, then there probably would no longer be a need for U.S. troops on the peninsula. Indeed, their efforts in this endeavor are seemingly universally applauded.^{58/} But everyone in the West seems to assume that a reunited Korea would be democratic in character and allied to it. Yet, a reunified Korea under the control of Kim Il Sung or his successor may be hostile to the West. The best assurance that Kim is not successful in bullying the South during the reunification talks is to keep the U.S. troops stationed there. If the talks fail, the U.S. forces will act as a deterrent against an attack from the North; if the talks succeed, then perhaps they could be withdrawn. In either event, it should be obvious that any withdrawal at this time would be sending the wrong signal to the North, perhaps even constituting a blunder as big as the withdrawal in 1948. And if a withdrawal of U.S. forces is justified on the basis that South Korea can adequately defend itself, then the effect may be equivalent to Acheson's horrendous mistake in omitting South Korea from the U.S. defensive perimeter in 1950. If both of these events occur, it may very well encourage Kim Il Sung to attack the South. Indeed, as one famous American, Yogi Berra, reportedly said in referring to this type of phenomenon, we would be experiencing "deja vu all over again." Such an illogical mistake should not be repeated.

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